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## A FAKE COLLECTOR.

There are more things in picture-dealing than meet the average eye. A gentleman, for example, who by some speculation or other comes into a large fortune, whereby much leisure is offered him, sometimes turns about to see how to indulge this leisure, while yet possibly turning an honest (!)—save the mark—penny. With some leaning towards art his soul is set on flame by reports that Old Masters have oftentimes been found in out-of-the-way places, picked up for a song, and later disposed of for fabulous sums. He sees his chance. He sets about to acquire some rudimentary knowledge of expertism. Then he haunts cheap junk-shops, and when an old daub comes up that his searching eye would persuade him might be turned into a masterpiece he bids and buys. So he owns in course of time begrimed, torn and rain-stained canvases, for which he pays say five or six dollars in the currency of the realm. The aid of an obliging firm of picture-restorers is called in quest. Expensive hundred-dollar gold frames, glass and shelter-boxes are provided—and behold the transformation complete. The five-dollar stretcher becomes a Watteau, the six-dollar miracle a Murillo, the nine-dollar wonder a Velasquez.

The first step is taken. Next now to establish this accreditation. Men of culture and standing are invited, dined and wined, who, when shown these treasures, are inveigled into giving an opinion. They cannot tell their host, whose bread they have eaten, to his face that he is a knave. Many are noncommittal. Some carelessly express approbation. Others size up their man, and, wanting to hoist him by his own petard, in ghoulish glee indulge his fancy.

Artists are visited in their studios. A sketch is cheaply bought, and the promise of the purchase of an important picture made. The invitation to view his own wonderful collection naturally follows, and—artists are but human—many approve what in their hearts they condemn. Even foreign artists, at vast expense, are entertained lavishly; but these men, having nothing to gain or lose, generally refuse to take the bait, and with scrupulous politeness give the bitter pill of disappointment to the deluded "collector."

In the meantime other wheels have been set turning. A man may be found who writes for the papers. He is cultivated. His weak spots are carefully noted. When the poor fellow is in financial straits a loan is readily forthcoming. Another one is made. After a while the tempter wants a notice of some special picture in an influential paper. What can the man do? His struggle is unavailing. He sells himself—jill the poor soul, goaded by conscience, exclaims: "Why shall I stand for that damned fraud?"—and takes the pistol or the poison.

And the collection is baptized with blood.

But more cheerful scenes beckon. Membership in various clubs is taken, and an assiduous pulling of wires lands our fakir in the art committee. Then comes his chance. He puts his pictures in the exhibitions of the club. And, shielded by theegis of clubdom, the critics forbear to denounce; they pass by or damn with faint praise.

Why is it that his membership on these committees is generally limited to one year? But, gentlemen, club members are not fools!

And his pictures are seen no more. His whine to special hearers, who cannot escape him: "Why don't they take my pictures?" goes unheeded, and even so: that egg won't hatch.

But all this costs a mint of money, and after a while: "There must be something realized, sir, on my vast investment. I have too much money tied up in my collection!" Egad—wine and victuals and goldleaf!

So a sale is planned. Not under his own name. That would give the snap away. An honest man, who believes in him—for even such will find some man somewhere that trusts them, because he is himself upright—will lend his name.

But draw the curtain on the tears!

The public knows. Now comes the critic. And the poor shreds in their gaudy stays are all bought back, to be hid in some out-of-the-way storage place, that perhaps in time the shame may be forgotten.

No, not all. All except one masterpiece. Some too fancy it and the price runs up into the hundreds, and when the hammer falls at half a thousand some one in the back of the room who a few years before in a Harlem auction house had bid up to \$3.75 and had let it go at \$9, falls in an apoplectic fit off his chair and disturbs the décorum of the meeting.

Is the finis of the tale not plain? Lincoln's maxim about fooling people still holds true. The opprobrium of honest men, social ostracism, denunciation and contempt for the "shovers of the queer."

Artists will be interested to hear of another exhibition not enumerated in the list appearing in the last number. It is the annual exhibition of oil paintings held by the Providence Art Club, which opens on March 6th, and continues until the 30th. Entry blanks may be had of M. W. Kern, secretary, to be addressed at the clubhouse on Thomas street. This old New England city, one of the first of the Colonial plantations, harbors many cultured art-lovers, and good work should be sent.



### I. THE DESIGNER.

Discussing in an introductory chapter the reasons for the dearth of good design in the majority of modern American industries, I distributed the responsibility between the designer, the manufacturer and the general public. If I add to these the trades unions, I practically involve the whole community. And this is a just estimate of the conditions, which are so far-reaching and diverse, so dovetailed together that an attempt to fasten the blame in any one direction would argue only a limited acquaintance with the subject.

While specifying the designer, I arraign the whole artistic profession. For if our designs are poor, it is primarily the designer who is at fault; but his incompetency is largely due to the poor facilities he has had for learning his craft and to the poor estimation in which it is held. And for both of these things the whole artistic profession is responsible.

The world takes us pretty well at our own estimation, and if the art of design is only grudgingly allowed a place in the general category of art, and that, one of comparatively small account, can we be surprised that the shrewd manufacturer, who has his finger on the public pulse, estimates it at small value, and that the general public, which is very much inclined to do its thinking by proxy, acquiesces in the estimate? Accordingly, if one body of men more than another is to be held responsible for the degradation of the art of design, it is the artists.

As long as that ridiculous shibboleth about "Fine Arts" and—well some other sort of art which is necessarily not "fine" and therefore inferior under any circumstance, is glibly used by artists, the conditions will remain unchanged. The money lavished upon art education will be diverted mainly into supporting the Fine Art curriculum; the ambition of students will be perpetually allured in the same direction and the genius for design will be either imperfectly cultivated or altogether crushed. The individual has opposed to him not only a preponderance of public sentiment, but the practical difficulty of inadequate opportunities.

This "Fine Art" distinction has at least the respectability of ancient lineage. It crops up in the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, who all his life was jealously anxious to be known by his "fine art," and valued his Perseus more than his salt-cellars—an estimate which posterity has been disposed to reverse. However, in those days there were a good many artistic giants doing giant's work, and very many craftsmen accomplishing eminently acceptable things, so that when one of the latter was head and shoulders above his fellows, it was not unnatural that he should aspire to the comradeship of the giant; though he may have been false to his own genius in doing so. But, as one traces the career of this distinction, one finds it has less and less to do with a difference in the quality of the things contrasted, becoming increasingly arbitrary, until the term "Fine Arts" has been narrowed down to the mere portrayal of figures in sculpture and to easel-pictures, with a certain grudging inclusion of mural paintings. The next and final step is to assume that all such sculpture and painting are works of fine art—and these only. The reasoning—or what passes for it—is that these are ideal conceptions, while the design of a lamp or teapot is only a utilitarian thing. But the statue of a politician in frock coat and trousers—is there much of the ideal in that; there may conceivably be, it is true, but as a rule? In a piece of old colonial furniture or in the moulding of a cornice is there not often more expression of genuine artistic feeling than in many statues? Again, will any sane critic assert the invariable superiority of easel pictures over, say, a Japanese vase? The more one searches the matter, the more plain it is that you cannot set arbitrary bounds to the expression of artistic feeling; and will gradually come to the conclusion of a well-known New York painter, expressed in my hearing, that if a man makes an artistic teapot he is as much entitled to the designation of "artist" as a man who has painted an artistic picture.

But only a few of his colleagues would agree with him; the rest are the majority and set the prevailing sentiment, which is one of intolerable pretension as regards the generality of pictures and sculptures, and gross indifference to the many other mediums of artistic expression. These are the men from whom the instructors of the art schools are selected, so it is not surprising on the one hand that the schools offer few, if any, facilities for training in design, and that the students on the other hand are all ambitious to paint easel pictures or to make statues—to be as they term it, "artists." So they take a few years' course and then when you ask them what they are, they say they are "artists," and Jones? "Oh, he is a designer." There you have it in a nutshell. Discouraged from the start, inadequately helped, it is not to be wondered that he often fails to become artistic, and that the art of design languishes.

I know that some art schools include a course in design, but the prejudice, referred to above, prevails; moreover, the study from the life